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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000345

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2018

TAGS: PREL ECON ETRD SMIG KU I2

SUBJECT: BASRA FIGHTING PROMPTS GOK TO HEIGHTEN ALERT AT BORDER

Classified By: CDA Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 25, the GOK heightened its alert along the northern border with Iraq. The GOK has increased MOI patrols of the area and placed a Kuwait Armed Forces reconnaissance battalion on alert. These moves come in response to renewed fighting between the GOI and armed militias in southern Iraq. The GOK has long feared a spillover of violence and/or refugees from this area. U.S. military traffic and MNF-I fuel deliveries continue unimpeded. End summary.

¶2. (C) DAO sources report that, on March 25, the GOK initiated 24-hour MOI patrols along its northern border with Iraq. In addition, it has placed the Kuwait Armed Forces' 10th reconnaissance battalion on alert and assigned one company from this unit as a quick reaction force to handle any border issues that may arise. Post's Customs Attaché reports that Iraq closed the Safwan (Iraq) / Abdali (Kuwait) border crossing on March 25, and a Kuwaiti MOD source says the GOK followed suit. However, other reports indicate the GOK has only closed this crossing to civilian/commercial traffic. Further west, Kuwait's Khabari crossing remains open to U.S. military traffic, and MNF-I fuel deliveries continue unimpeded.

¶3. (C) The GOK has long feared the potential spillover effects of violence in southern Iraq and is unwilling/unable to handle an influx of Iraqi refugees. Kuwait's PM reiterated this point in a March 25 meeting with DHS Secretary Chertoff (septel), noting that the GOK would be

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maintaining tight border security, and that it had neither the personnel nor the infrastructure to handle a surge of Iraqi refugees. He also expressed GOK concern about the possibility of armed militias infiltrating Kuwait. Later that day, FM Dr. Mohammad Al Sabah said that Kuwait has installed observation posts every three kilometers along its border with Iraq, and that MOI border guards utilize infrared sights with an effective range of five kilometers. On March 24, Secretary Chertoff toured the entire Iraq/Kuwait border area - from Khabari Crossing to the Khor Abdallah - via helicopter with Embassy and GOK officials.

¶4. (U) Multiple Arab-language dailies and one English-language daily carried this story on March 27. However, coverage has been light, and Kuwaiti public opinion appears subdued thus far.

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